

Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy)

Gospel Reading

John 20:19-31

Thomas believes because he sees Jesus.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's reading, from the Gospel of John, is proclaimed on the second Sunday of Easter in each of the three Sunday Lectionary cycles. This should alert us to the significance of the encounters with the resurrected Jesus described in this reading. This Gospel combines two scenes: Jesus' appearance to his disciples after his Resurrection and Jesus' dialogue with Thomas, the disciple who doubted.

Part of the mystery of Jesus' Resurrection is that he appeared to his disciples not as a spirit but in bodily form. We do not know exactly what this form was like. Earlier in John's Gospel, when Mary of Magdala first encountered the risen Jesus, she did not recognize the figure standing before her until Jesus spoke her. In Luke's Gospel, the disciples walking on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus until he broke bread with them. We know from readings such as today's that in his resurrected body, Jesus was no longer bound by space; he appeared to the disciples in spite of the locked door. And yet, on this resurrected body, the disciples could still observe the marks of his Crucifixion.

In today's Gospel, Jesus greets his disciples with the gift of peace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also commissions his disciples to continue the work that he has begun. As Jesus was sent by God, so too does Jesus send his disciples. This continuity with Jesus' own mission is an essential element of the Church.

Jesus grants the means to accomplish this mission when he gives his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit binds us together as a community of faith and strengthens us to bear witness to Jesus' Resurrection.

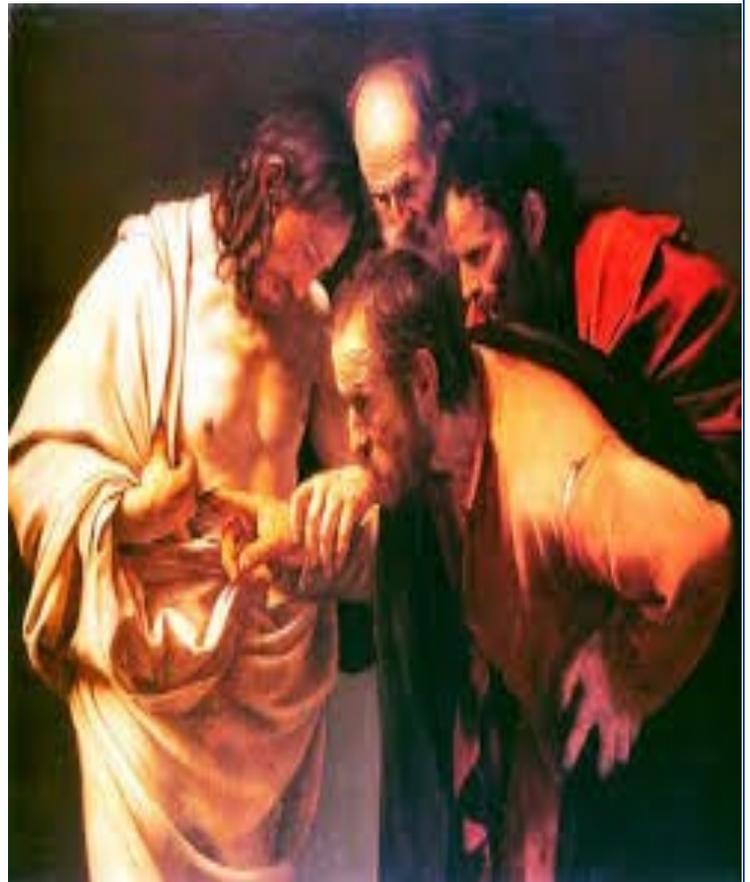
Jesus' words to his disciples also highlight the integral connection between the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness and reconciliation are gifts to us from Jesus.

With the grace of the Holy Spirit, we can share these with others. This is another essential aspect of what it means to be Christ's Church. The Church continues Jesus' ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Thomas, the disciple who doubts, represents the reality of the Church that comes after this first community of disciples. All but the first disciples of Jesus must believe without seeing. Like Thomas, we may doubt the news that Jesus, who was crucified and buried, appeared to his disciples. It is part of our human nature to seek hard evidence that the Jesus who appeared to the disciples after his death is, indeed, the same Jesus who was crucified.

Thomas is given the opportunity to be our representative who obtains this evidence. He gives witness to us that the Jesus who was raised is the same Jesus who had died. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are among those who are blessed for we have not seen and yet have believed.

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